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ABSTRACT

Adults who work in Montessori schools often experience loneliness, stress, and burnout. Evidence suggests that the way an organization is managed has considerable impact on the mental health of the people who work in it. It is important to recognize that leadership and managerial roles differ. The head of a school, as leader, moves the organization towards its goals. The manager's principal role is to maintain the status quo in an organization. Phases of school development make different demands on leaders. In pioneer and expansion stages, everyone's energies, talents, and resources are focused on the goal, the creation of the Montessori school. In the consolidation phase, curriculum richness becomes apparent in the classrooms and playspaces, and even the office area often boasts of a copying machine. But have the teachers, who are not being provided subsistence level salaries, shared in this richness? At the present time insufficient numbers of potential teachers are entering training. Serious problems such as these can be solved by skilled school leadership. (RH)

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ARE YOU A MANAGER? or ARE YOU A LEADER?

Marlene Barron

WHAT HAVE YOU CHOSEN TO BE? It is a choice, not a calling.

The health of the Montessori movement, the health of Montessori schools, is and will be determined by its leaders, by you. If you do not accept the leadership role in your school, **we** (all of us) are in trouble. The decisions of each of us affects all of us.

Over the years I have become increasingly concerned over the health of our schools. Montessori schools are wonderful places for children; they enable children to grow, to learn and to reach their full potential. However, Montessori schools, our Montessori schools, are often **not healthy** places for adults, for the adults who work in them. Loneliness, stress and burn out are the symptoms.

My goal today is to present another way for you to look at your school, to awaken within you a conscious awareness of the need for you to 'take care of' your organization, your school, and to give you some tools to accomplish that purpose. Strategies that when implemented will move you into the leadership position from the managers position, - the managers position being a more stressful role because it has less power and gives you less control over your life. Tools that you will recognize and be comfortable with because they are basically the same strategies good teachers use in their classrooms. The principles in fostering wellness in organizations are the same as the principles used in creating well run Montessori classrooms. I am not, however, going to use Montessori jargon in this talk; instead I will be using organizational management language. Your task will be to translate and integrate.

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Montessori teachers train and work diligently for many years to become exemplary classroom teachers; heads of schools also need to train and work toward the goal of becoming leaders. You can learn the skills and tools needed to lead your organization.

Your school, as an organization, is a living system. Like all living systems it is composed of discrete components which when taken together create the whole. The components interact with each other and the whole interacts with other wholes and its environment. Organizations grow and develop, have a history, experience crisis and adapt.

Organizations that are well run exude an exuberence, a sense of released creative energy, a feeling of committment and are peopled with those fortunate enough to be excited about coming to work each morning.

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Exemplary organizations, healthy organizations, are in a constant state of self renewal and innovation, as are the individuals who work in them. The services and products of these organizations are of the finest quality. A commitment to quality validates the intrinsic worth of the work and of the people doing the work. Nothing corrodes the work ethic more than the perception that the people in charge are indifferent to quality. Nothing is more demoralizing than to think your school was chosen by a parent because it was nearby and the quality of its programs was irrelevant.

The American Montessori Society through its commitment to quality validates the worth of our work. The consultation and accreditation programs are the processes that validate the worth our work.

What kind of environment creates enthusiastic constituents? What is it that creates a workplace within which teachers and staff can be self actualizing and performing at their finest? Evidence suggests that the **way** an organization is managed has considerable import on the mental health of the people who work in it.

I have a few ideas I'd like to share. My premise is that we create our organizations; we can change them. We have the power to make changes.

First of all, excellent organizations have <u>leaders</u> as the Head of the School. Healthy organizations have visionary, dynamic, decisive, communicative leadership.

The head of a school, as the leader of the school, moves the organization towards its goals. The head of the school identifies and reidentifies goals <u>with</u> the constituents and forcefully, obsessively and certainly lovingly stays focused on the organization's mission. The head of the school directs the introduction of a continuing flow of change and innovation; the head recognizes that the school is **owned** by those who use it. Thus by continually building on this sense of ownership within the members of the school community (faculty, administration, parents, and students) a spirit of collaboration and trust is developed. Solutions to difficult problems can be found when the participants work **jointly** on issues. Mutual responsibility for problems and solutions do result. Teachers who become involved in the school's decision making and communication network feel valued as individuals, feel listened to and, consequently, share in the success of the enterprise as a whole. When you feel a valued part of an endeavor, you share in its successes and assume responsibility for its problems.

The Manager's, the administrator's, principle role is to maintain the status quo in an organization, - to keep the wheels turning but <u>not</u> to create movement. Successful leaders, at times, can behave like managers when necessary and by choice.

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Think of a school as a living organism, the head of the school can be conceived of as the brain. The brain is responsible for directing the voluntary and involuntary systems in the body. The brain recieves information and acts on information. With out a brain an organism is considered brain dead although it can be kept alive by life support systems,- a manager is analogous to the life support system. A slow deterioration takes place in all systems when there is no brain, no head, no leadership.

Schools need to have a head. Schools become active, living, dynamic organisms with a head. Think of your title and what it may signify. In New York City, a group of private preschool directors who work together sharing strategies and solving problems changed its name, this Fall, from 'nursery directors association' to 'Heads of early childhood programs". Independent Schools, both boarding and day schools, have had head masters and head mistresses for years; recently these titles were changed to the norsexist 'Head of School'. You are not only what you eat but you become what you call yourself.

Your school exists for a purpose, its mission. Your school, as an amalgam of interdependent groups having different immediate needs, different goals, different ways of working, different formal training and different styles of functioning, has developed its own personality, its own collection of beliefs, myths, values and rituals. This culture, this system of shared values and beliefs, determines the organization's structure and the way the staff relates to each other and to their constituents (students and parents). Culture, as a synthesis of shared vision, purpose, history and understanding of 'how things are done', determines what people call problems, what people call success and the ways people respond to these issues.

I now want to ask each of you - What is your vision? What do you want your school to look like in 5 years? in 10 Years? Whom will it be serving? What services will it be providing? Have you developed long range goals? Does the faculty share in this vision? Have they helped create it? How about the parents? Why not?

Leaders make small decisions daily based on long range goals; they train those who work with them to also make decisions based on long range goals.

As the director of your school, if your daily experience is one of being pulled from one situation to another, forced to make decisions on immediate problems, not being able to 'get time for yourself' to think about things, you have become a manager. bogged down in administrative functions, surviving on a day to day basis.

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Your school is growing and changing following the guidelines laid out by the culture.

The Founder of the organization usually establishes the culture.

Leaders of organizations shape the culture. Shape means change.

Each of you, in your schools, has the power to shape your school's systems, procedures, and policies to reflect your values. I believe that each of you has a vision. A vision which has the capacity and power to capture and motivate people.

I plead with you - no matter what size your school- to pay attention to and clarify your school's goals. Set long range plans. Make the future happen. Be leaders in your school because if you do not consciously attend to your vision, to your mission, someone else will to theirs. Nature abhors a vacuum. One does not need the title LEADER in order to be one.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership is a process of influencing the activities of the group toward a common goal, toward the vision.

Leadership behavior is a highly variable behavior which depends on the person, her/his constituents, the nature of the job requirements and the kind of problem situations to be dealt with. No easy generalizations can be made about leadership. We do know that the underlying assumptions a person makes about people will determine how s/he will lead them. Thus an awareness of one's own values and beliefs is critical. Know who you are and what you want. Then learn tools appropriate to different situations. These are the three interlocking keys to leadership.

Directors of schools are people with a title and some authority over others. Heads of schools who have developed a clear mission and involve staff and parents in the planning and implementation process are leaders.

Most Montessori schools began as a result of a vision, -of a parent looking for quality preschool education or of a teacher who wanted an opportunity to create his/her ideal classroom.

During a school's early years, the PIONEER STAGE, the founder, who after the initial decade becomes the legendary hero/ine, develops from his/her loins the school's mission, defining the business the school intends to be in and how it intends to be in it. The rapid success of most Montessori schools can be attributed to the clarity of the school's initial mission and its ability to be communicated to parents. We know what we are and what we do and we 'tell it well'. The founder lays out superordinate goals which become the motivational base, the unifying force, the guide to all decision making.

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The successful founder has leadership tools.

What are some of these behaviors? Think about yourself as I describe these traits.

A successful leader keeps well informed and maintains open pipelines to all information. As new arenas of interest open up, information is stored/ catalogued/ and continually updated.

A leader focuses his/her time and energy, setting priorities based on how they will help reach the goal.

A leader learns to play the power game, conserving energy for winable issues and tries not to challange or fight unnecessarily. S/he tries to move through the corridors of comparative indifference. There are ways to accomplish one's purpose without always banging heads. Flexibility in modifying plans in the light of emerging reality is a key to success.

Successful leaders enjoy a sense of timing whether it be for ideas or people. The incredible success of the montessori mov't this time around was because of timing. Not even Nancy Rambusch could have brought about the resurgence of montessori in the 1920s.

A leader's overall task is to provide people with direction. This requires that the leader needs to understand the total picture while working on its discrete parts. Another way to look at this process is that the leader pulls into a pattern the thousands of daily, seemingly unconnected, incidents creating a structure out of ambiguity.

Leadership thinking is multi-dimensional (right hemispheric); leaders are capable of selective combination and selective comparison.

Decisions are made by asking: will the solution move the organization closer toward its goals? How will this solution be perceived by the various groups affiliated with the organization? How will this solution influence programs in progress?

Other needed qualities of a leader include: a sense of humor, organizational skills, and human relation skills.

I have observed that after a school is established, some founders have a difficult time with the school's next developmental stage and often leave the organization to found another school. Founders often develop 'an heroic' self image which needs constant reinforcement. They often create an ongoing series of crisis which can be 'resolved' dramatically, thus saving the school. Remember: beliefs and values determine our expectations which then become self fulfilling prophecies.

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The next phase, the EXPANSION stage is marked by periods of upheaval and periods of indecision and ambiguity. The school needs a leader who can create a self reinforcing atmosphere of trust and a climate which will tolerate prolonged ambiguity.

Problems need to be resolved with **and/also** decisions rather than **either/or** decisions. The skills of reconciling apparent contradictions are needed; for example, a school does not need to choose between program X or program Y, it possibily can do both in a systematic fashion over time (long range planning).

Desired leadership characteristics during the expansion phase remain the same. The leader needs to continue to be well informed on all issues, to maintain a sense of timing and a sense of humor, to understand the politics involved and most difficultly to stay focused on the schools mission,-the vision. There are often critical tests during this stage which put the school's survival at stake. Pressures from parents and from board members often create situations whereby the head of the school can easily make a decision to please a group without staying focused on the school's purpose.

The examples that immediately come to mind are whether to open a montessori elementary class because the parents want it but without a montessori trained elementary teacher or to open a toddler class again without the montessori trained infant/toddler teacher. I ask you would any you have opened your initial 3-6 class with a wonderful person who had lots of information but was not Montessori trained?

As a school matures, the qualities needed by the leader also evolve and attention must be focused on maintenance, ongoing evaluation and adaptation - less on growth. This next period is one of CONSOLIDATION when a school becomes an institution.

As leaders, we are ultimately responsible for the resources of our institutions. Starting micro, we have the classroom materials. Everyone in this room understands the importance of each piece of material and I am sure has established procedures to maintain the materials. This attention to detail, this awareness of the whole and its parts seems to get lost when we move to the larger physical environment.

Whether space is rented or owned, school heads need to consider their physical space a resource and prioritize accordingly. Buildings can put up with a lot of neglect before they give up, but they should not be neglected. One maintains health, one does not just respond to illness.

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Our society's belief system has not institutionalized ongoing environmental maintenace as a value. And because of this we are in serious infrastructure trouble. Our buildings, bridges and roads are falling apart. I plead with you to respect your building as well as the materials in it and develop procedures for its care. Be a model for the children. Set a standard for responsible societal behavior in your community.

The most important nonreplenishable resource we have is the faculty. - and folks, they, as a group, are not being treated well, they are not being treated in a way that encourages their continued presence in our schools. The most obvious issue is money; the other issues include feelings of self-worth and power.

In the pioneer and expansion stages of a school's development, everyone's energies, talent and resources are focused on the goal, the creation of the montessori school.

In the consolidation phase, curriculum richness becomes apparent in the classrooms and playspaces (cinderblocks and boards become shelf units) and even the office area often boasts of a copying machine. But have the teachers shared in this richness?

Schools have the opportunity at this time to reexamine their way of relating to their human resources, - teachers and parents.

The limiting factor to any organization's survivial is the human factor. If there are no montessori teachers, there are no montessori schools. The ability to provide leadership to the faculty directly affects each teachers performance. Policies and priorities must be established to emphasize and enhance teacher effectiveness.

Research in the area of employee performance and effectiveness suggests that an employee's basic needs for food, clothing, shelter and safety must be met **before** the organization can successfully develop practices to motivate employees. According to the salary survey recently conducted by the AMS, we are not providing our montesssori trained teachers with subsistence level salaries. Who can live on a salary below $12,000.? Yet out of 70 newly certified 3-6 teachers, 59 were making <u>under</u> $12,000 for a 9 month school year (84%); after 9 years, 45 out of 48 3-6 certified teachers were making under $19,000. for the 9 month school year (94%).

Because of these shockingly low salaries and minimum other benefits, we attract and keep idealistic women and men who have other sources of income. Not one person here today, nor any school head, nor any board members is purposefully keeping salaries low. Each of us recognizes the need to increase salary levels.

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We are indeed fortunate that those adults attracted to montessori teacher training have also been visionaries. They see and are willing to work towards the possibility of a better world in the future. However, they also need food on the table and money in their pockets. In the past we attracted good people but could not keep them. TODAY we are having trouble attracting potential teachers.

The solutions to this life threatening problem will not come out of **either/or** solutions (either we raise tuitions significantly or we keep teacher salaries low) but must come out of **and/also** solutions (raise salaries and also maintain reasonable tuition levels). We all recognize the fact that our society, as a whole, does not value the work of teachers and therefore pays them accordingly. Is that also our belief?

We need to work with other early childhood and family oriented organizations both within the educational sphere and without to change our culture's beliefs and values and in finding creative solutions to this problem.

Creative solutions to problems are more likely to develop out of school climates which nurture faculty and parent involvement and growth and which provide the necessary information and skills.

Directors who recognize that each staff member has individual, goals and who can merge the faculty's and parents' goals into an overall plan of operation will achieve the maximum collaborative effort. Groups that share the desire to achieve common goals are also able to come to agreement on the means for obtaining these goals.

My underlying assumption is that each individual can get his/her personal and/or professional goals and aspirations met through collaborative goal setting. A process which leads to a cycle of planning and implementation which with feedback leads to replanning and adjusting the implementation steps.

In other words, by your supporting a psychological climate that practices openness, encourages skepticism and strives to make each adult an integral part of the school, the faculty, board, administration and parents can develop a mutually acceptable set of goals and together search for solutions to problems. The task of the head is to create and capitalize on opportunities for adults to share and participate in decision making processes which affect the school as a whole. Participation in this process is a satisfying, productive experience for all concerned. It is what competent teachers do in well run classrooms.

We, as Montessorians, believe that humans (adults and children) take pleasure in and thrive on growth and feelings of competency and that these goals are attainable through the class/the school. We believe that work is a source of challenge, meaning, and opportunity for self actualization.

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My task today was to get you thinking about your school as a growing, changing organization; an organism which evolves through different developmental stages, which has needs and which can be changed. I have done this by continually refocusing on your role as leader.

TO REPEAT: A leader uses influence to achieve purpose through people. Group members accept the leadership of those who help the member get his/her needs met and who make the person feel worthwhile.

In summary - I want to encourage each of you to reexamine your values and belief systems and their relationships to your personnel practices and ways of relating to parents. Self awareness is a source of personal power.

Identify your goals. Know what you want and then work in collaboration with parents and teachers to develop **school** goals.

Recognize the fact that you have the ability and power to change the way things are done in your school. If you need specific information or tools go out and get the information. Your school needs you as its leader. The American Montessori Society needs you. Choose to be that leader!!

(Thank you for attending the luncheon for Heads Of Schools.)

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